Volume 1 • Number 3 • January, 2001

Schoolscapes
The Newsletter

The Challenges of the Reform
Moving Forward

By Pascale Sauvé
Translated by Phyllis Aronoff

At the end of the training session of November 27-28, 2000, Robert Bisaillon, the assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, presented the participants with five major challenges to be met in the coming term, based on the experiences of the schools as well as on what is currently being said and written about the reform.

The assistant deputy minister addressed the accusation that the schools are not properly prepared to implement the education reform. He pointed out that the schools are involved in a process of testing that is essential to implementation, and that "the solution cannot come before the problem." The challenge now, to avoid makeshift approaches, is to plan actions according to pedagogical goals. The objectives to be attained and the improvements to be made have to be clearly defined through consultation with educators, resource persons and teachers as well as students. Pedagogical goals provide consistency and give meaning to the activities suggested in the training sessions, and to those in the classroom. Pedagogical goals also create links among the various activities, so that they can be used in other contexts. If this kind of planning exists on the individual, team, school and school board levels, Bisaillon feels that "it will be possible to experiment within safe guidelines, and we will not be making things up as we go along."

planifier des interventions dotées d'une intention pédagogique

The second challenge is related to the accusation that competencies obscure, replace or overshadow knowledge. This is a mistake, says Bisaillon: "Knowledge is an integral part of a competency." In other words, a person cannot develop a competency without knowledge. "This is true for teachers as well as students," he says. Many teachers now feel shaky and incompetent because they have the impression that they have to forget all their previous knowledge and practices related to the teaching-centred paradigm. But Bisaillon reassures them: "You are not starting from zero. You are being asked to broaden the concept of knowledge and apply it to the development of competencies, drawing on your own experience and your own knowledge, which is often theoretical but also practical." It is important to recognize that the integration of knowledge is not optional; on the contrary, it must be planned and structured. This is why knowledge of the program and the tools that go with it is essential. "There would be less nonsense written if people read the program, and we ourselves would be less easily influenced by that nonsense if we read it ourselves," said Bisaillon, who estimates that at least half of all teachers never

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read the old programs. "You have to be familiar with the *Québec Education Program*, with its design and the way the parts fit together, in order to be able to gain some perspective on it and use it with freedom, as a professional."

The third challenge is to put yourself in a learning situation. The training sessions are organized so as to stimulate intellectual activity by the participants. "This is not a detour; it is a

"Finally, the great challenge that subsumes the others is to continue to move forward, avoiding the pitfalls of weariness, disinformation and cynicism, and sustaining our enthusiasm--for I have witnessed this enthusiasm when I visited various regions of Québec."

de mettre les connaissances au service du développement des compétences

way to call on people's competencies," explained Bisaillon. "We have to avoid superficiality and standardization, which are temptations for an organization. You have to put yourself in a learning situation in order to be able to do so with others."

l'évaluation des apprentissages est la seule façon de reconnaître chacun à la hauteur de son potentiel

The fourth challenge is evaluation, which is currently a major concern. "The evaluation of learning is the reef upon which the reform risks being shipwrecked. We must be very careful," warned Bisaillon. He stressed that evaluation does not mean reducing the most talented students to the lowest common denominator; nor does it mean excluding students who perform at a lower level. "When it is fair, authentic and qualitative, the evaluation of learning is the only way to recognize students according to their individual potential. The challenge is all the greater in a performance-based society such as ours, in which it is not enough to be good, you've got to be the best. "We need to think about this question very seriously. We mustn't play sorcerer's apprentice, but at the same time we shouldn't provide overly simple report cards or give parents a word-for-word copy of the program." An evaluation that is rigorously planned in terms of a standard of performance has to recognize learning by all students, whatever their level.

se mettre soi-même en situation d'apprentissage

The Regulation of Learning and Its Demands for Teachers

By Nadine Rouillard
Translated by Phyllis Aronoff

Professor Dany Laveault of the University of Ottawa answered a number of questions from the participants in the following areas: evaluation, motivation, social factors and differentiation of instruction.

EVALUATION

Professor Laveault was asked to clarify the concepts of regulation and evaluation, self-regulation and self-evaluation, formative evaluation and summative evaluation, and to discuss the relationships among them. The participants also asked for further explanation of formative evaluation and regulation.

"Many studies of the effectiveness of new teaching or evaluation methods are based on the premise that the students are motivated. But we all know this is not the case in Québec schools. In order for there to be self-regulation of learning, the learner needs strong motivation, real stakes that matter deeply to him or her, a desire for knowledge and a commitment to learn," said Laveault. He quoted Perrenoud: "Pedagogical discourse still very often moves in a fictional world in which students want to learn, have mastered the prerequisites and do not resist the methods used."

Laveault pointed out that not all students are interested in receiving feedback from teachers, carrying out self-evaluation or committing themselves to a task. Students are unlikely to monitor their learning process if they are not interested in the task or if they feel it is impossible for them to succeed in it. "Metacognition and summative evaluation reflect students' motivation. When students take part in formative evaluation, it is because they are already motivated to learn," said Laveault.

MOTIVATION

Professor Laveault was asked: "How can we modify aspects of evaluation, making it a formative experience and a learning experience while increasing student and teacher motivation?"

He drew on two theories for his answer. The theory of perceived self-efficacy tells us that people engage in an action only if they perceive that they have a reasonable chance of success. Thus students will be more ready to commit themselves to a task if they are convinced they will be able to carry it to completion.

In addition, goal theory teaches us that people are more motivated to achieve goals that are closer, and that it is preferable to break a task down into a sequence of small goals to be reached. For example, corrections may be done progressively with respect to a few short-term objectives if correcting everything at once would be too demanding. A gradual approach works best.

Dany Laveault
Professeur de l'Université d'Ottawa

There are two processes going on: that of the teacher, which involves external cognitive regulation, and that of the learner, which is internal, cognitive and based on motivation. From the teacher's point of view, not all mistakes are equally important, and teachers have to decide which ones to correct first—the most urgent ones, the oldest ones or the ones that are most important in terms of the curriculum and the learning prerequisites. "To teachers the problem may seem insurmountable from a scientific point of view, because of the large number of factors involved," said Laveault.

It is possible to ask students where they would like the teacher to start correction. "Asking the students means accepting the shift from a scientific, rational, cognitive process to a human one that may not be rational. The right choices from a scientific point of view may not necessarily be the right choices from a human point of view. Indeed, what teachers consider important in the curriculum is not always what students perceive as important for them," Laveault pointed out.

Professor Laveault was also asked to distinguish between interactive formative evaluation and formative evaluation based on feedback. He quoted Perrenoud, who pointed out that, historically, the concept of formative evaluation was developed after the fact. According to Laveault, remediation is based on the reaction and on feedback on one or more learning sequences, taking into account what has been learned and the observable difficulties. "Formative evaluation is a process of remediation through feedback, which is influenced by cognitive science, rather than one of proactive motivation, which is influenced by social-cognitive theories," said Laveault.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Three roles were discussed: the role of parents, the role of teachers and the role of the Ministère. Parents have an important role in the development of children's capacity for self-control. Laveault stated that "parents who have a high degree of confidence in their own capacity to help their child tend to guide the child's learning and to play a more active role in the child's success at school." In order to increase parents' involvement in their children's homework, not only the curriculum but also the social and cognitive aspects of the parents' motivation have to be taken into account.

The role of teachers can be explained by social-cognitive theories of motivation, which give rise to the following three propositions: (1) students will be more motivated if they perceive that they can exercise some control on the activity they are carrying out, and teachers will be more motivated if they perceive that they can exercise control on their activity; (2) students will be more motivated if they perceive that they will be capable of carrying out the activity, and teachers will be more motivated if they perceive that they will be capable of carrying out their activity; (3) students will be more motivated if they receive feedback on their performance in relation to short-term objectives they have set for themselves, and teachers will be more motivated if they receive feedback on their performance in relation to short-term objectives they have set for themselves.

"An administrative approach that claims to help teachers by rigidly supervising them, leaving them little choice concerning their teaching strategies or evaluation methods, is not consistent with the functioning of responsible, self-regulating teachers who want to feel more effective, who are motivated to keep going despite the difficulties they encounter in the classroom and who feel that they are in control of their pedagogical activities," said Laveault.

DIFFERENTIATION OF INSTRUCTION

In answer to several questions on the differentiation of instruction, Laveault explained that it is not always possible for teachers to take individual differences into account in the regulation of learning in the classroom. Teachers cannot always be available to deal with students on an individual basis.

Professor Laveault concluded by pointing out that "teachers will be best able to respect and use students' individual differences by drawing on various aspects of the regulation of learning, that is, by varying the methods, objectives and standards, the use of feedback and the type of remediation."

Differentiated Instruction: Moving from Theory to Practice

By Eve Krakow

At a workshop on differentiated instruction, participants identified some key issues for integrating differentiated instruction into day-to-day practice.

"Differentiated instruction is a teaching philosophy based on the premise that teachers should adapt instruction to student differences. Rather than marching students through the curriculum in lockstep, teachers should modify their instruction to meet students' varying readiness levels, learning preferences, and interests."1

While few teachers will argue with this concept, the challenge lies in translating it into practice. The purpose of the workshop on the second morning of the two-day training session was therefore to discuss the nature of differentiated instruction and how it can be applied in classrooms.

In the English workshop, participants began by reading four education journal articles2 that dealt with differentiated instruction. After discussing the articles in small groups, they identified some key issues to be considered.

Professional development was identified as a crucial need. While many were concerned about the lack of money and time available for staff development, one participant countered: "What's important is to take that first step. That requires proactive leadership. It's not just an issue of money and time."

We need to value classrooms that work this way and to recognize attempts being made, said another. Other participants pointed out that, like the children, teachers will learn by making mistakes.

Modelling and teacher collaboration

Teacher collaboration and modelling—within the system, the school and the cycle—are also two key strategies for making this transition, participants said. "Administrators have a key role to play in matching people," said one participant.

"Teaching is a lonely profession," noted another. "No one is there to see you. Kids won't tell you how you're doing, and parents phone only when there's a problem. Differentiation is most likely to work if teachers can discuss and share their experiences with each other. And with the new cycle teams, teachers are in a better position to find support."

One of the articles distributed at the workshop described three types of teachers: Mr. A, the traditional teacher who swears by the textbook, lectures and tests; Mrs. B, who uses games and projects that fully engage the students, but whose approach does not give students a clear sense of what they should understand or be learning as a result of these activities; and Ms. C., who outlines the facts, terms, concepts and skills her students need to learn, has them work in teams on different projects according to their interests and level of readiness, and continually assesses their progress.

Workshop participants recognized similarities between these three character types and teachers in their own schools. They agreed that Mrs. B. had the right intentions, and that with some guidance, she could easily make the transition to a Ms. C. Some participants felt the need for a Mr. or Ms. D—someone who would combine the good qualities of B and C, but be somewhat less directive than the Ms. C presented in the article and give students more time to reflect on their learning.

"What will convince A's to move to becoming C's or D's is that the kids will let them know they are not happy, because sooner or later the children will have encountered a B or C," said one school principal. "Kids today rebel—and their parents support them. Already, kids are starting to voice their opinions. I had a teacher with 20 years' experience come to me recently and ask, 'What should I do?'"

Caution was another watchword. "Sometimes small steps generate big results and the teacher is overwhelmed," said another school principal, on the basis of her own experience. "This is not necessarily positive or negative, but something to be aware of. We also have to be careful not to just latch on to one thing and say we're doing 'it' [the new curriculum]. We must continually go back to the program and make connections. We must be wary of becoming too narrow in our approach."

The Mrs. B. character provided an example of a teacher missing these connections. She had incorporated some aspects (project-based learning, teamwork, letting students choose their own process) but was not specific in her expectations and lacked the structure needed to ensure that learning was taking place.

Teaching and learning activities must be structured and engaging, participants agreed. "These two factors are a tandem," emphasized one participant. "It's not only about getting kids involved—there has to be a structure so that they know where they're going."

Notes

1. Scott Willis and Larry Mann, "Differentiating Instruction: Finding Manageable Ways to Meet Individual Needs," *Curriculum Update* (The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), Winter 2000.
2. Workshop materials included:
   - Carol Ann Tomlinson, "Differentiated Instruction: Can It Work?" (Condensed from *The School Administrator*, October 1999), *The Education Digest*, January 2000.
   - Carol Ann Tomlinson, "Mapping a Route Toward Differentiated Instruction," *Educational Leadership*, September 1999.
   - Kari Sue Wehrmann, "Baby Steps: A Beginner's Guide." *Educational Leadership*, September 2000.
   - An excerpt from Carol Ann Tomlinson's book, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* (ASCD, 1999).

A Few Strategies

The articles reviewed in the workshop provided concrete examples of how teachers in different schools in the United States are using differentiated instruction. One article (Willis and Mann—see notes) also offered the following strategies, adapted and condensed from the 1999 ASCD book *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, by Carol Ann Tomlinson:

Stations. *Using stations involves setting up different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously. These stations invite flexible grouping because not all students need to go to all stations all the time.*

Compacting. *This strategy encourages teachers to assess students before beginning a unit of study or development of a skill. Students who do well on the pre-assessment do not continue work on what they already know.*

Complex Instruction. *This strategy uses challenging materials, open-ended tasks, and small instructional groups. Teachers move among the groups as they work, asking students questions and probing their thinking.*

Orbital Studies. *These independent investigations, generally lasting three to six weeks, revolve around some facet of the curriculum. Students select their own topics, and they work with guidance and coaching from the teacher.*

Entry Points. *This strategy from Howard Gardner proposes student explorations of a given topic through as many as five avenues: narrational (presenting a story), logical quantitative (using numbers or deduction), foundational (examining philosophy and vocabulary), aesthetic (focusing on sensory features), and experiential (hands-on).*

Problem-Based Learning. *This strategy places students in the active role of solving problems in much the same way adult professionals perform their jobs.*

Choice Boards. *With this strategy, work assignments are written on cards that are placed in hanging pockets. By asking a student to select a card from a particular row of pockets, the teacher targets work toward student needs yet allows student choice.*

4MAT. *Teachers who use 4MAT plan instruction for each of four learning preferences over the course of several days on a given topic. Thus, some lessons focus on mastery, some on understanding, some on personal involvement, and some on synthesis. As a result, each learner has a chance to approach the topic through preferred modes and also to strengthen weaker areas*

One School's Story

By Nadine Rouillard
Translated by Phyllis Aronoff

Nicole Lefebvre, coordinator of the pilot schools at the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes, introduced Alice Bender, principal of Harold Napper School in Brossard, and Marlène Demers, a remedial teacher at the same school, who gave an account of the special education services provided by the school. Their presentation was part of the training session organized by the Ministère de l'Éducation on November 27-28.

Ms. Bender began by describing the school. Harold Napper is an English-language elementary school in suburban Montréal, with 637 students. The school provides a French immersion program as well as instruction in English.

There are about a hundred students in the school with various difficulties that affect learning—Tourette syndrome, cystic fibrosis, intellectual impairments, hearing impairments, behavioural difficulties, etc.—as well as gifted children. All the children are in integrated classes, and according to the principal all of them are capable of educational success.

Bender said it is important that the teachers in an integrated school support each other. "Integration can't be carried out by one person alone. It must be a shared responsibility."

Marlène Demers spoke of the importance of changing our thinking about the role of the remedial teacher in the school. For each child with special needs, the remedial teacher meets with all the school staff involved and the parents in order to draw up an individualized education plan that will allow the child to achieve success. She pointed out that motivation, involvement and responsibility are the factors that make it possible for students with difficulties to be integrated and to achieve success in school.

Bender and Demers concluded by saying that they are very interested in establishing connections with teachers or schools that are interested in working on the integration of students with special needs. They may be reached by e-mail at <abender@rsb.qc.ca> and <marlenedemers@rsb.qc.ca> respectively.

Summing Up:
Enthusiasm Tempered With Realism

By Phyllis Aronoff

The final workshop gave the participants an opportunity to look at what they had learned in the two days of the session and how it could be used in the elementary school classroom and eventually at the secondary level.

Workshop leader Bev Steele began by summing up the three main themes of the activities: content, regulation and differentiation. The session clarified the place of content in the new curriculum, she said, and laid to rest the myth that the new programs ignore content. It also brought out the importance of regulation in teaching and learning. As for differentiation, Steele stated, "We've had no choice but to confront that notion."

Bringing it all back home

Workshop participants broke up into small groups to talk about what they felt were the most important ideas they would take back with them to their schools. They were generally quite positive about the education reform—after all, as one pointed out, "we are the convinced"—but their enthusiasm was tempered by a recognition of the increased demands it puts on school teams, particularly teachers.

"Teachers are now expected to be learners and implementers, to connect theory and practice," one participant said, but at the same time he welcomed the "new possibilities for sharing." Many spoke of the need for time and sustained support to allow teachers to shoulder their new responsibilities. More specifically, the participants asked for resources to help them make connections and develop teamwork, and for practical tools—especially evaluation tools. A number of them pointed out that the *Québec Education Program* is itself a useful tool, filled with ideas that teachers can use.

Some participants commented that the best teachers are already using regulation and differentiation, and spoke of the need to validate their practice. Others warned that this could lead to complacency and a failure to recognize the genuinely new aspects of the *Québec Education Program*. It is important to find a balance between validation and challenge, continuity and change. One educator compared teaching to crop rotation, in which change leads to increased fertility—to which his colleagues quickly responded by pointing out that this practice also entails fallow periods.

Looking ahead toward secondary school

The participants also looked at strategies for introducing the reform in secondary school. They pointed out that since teachers at that level are subject specialists, it requires more planning to create connections among disciplines. But they felt that it was important to start the process with small, voluntary groups of teachers.

With respect to the differentiation of instruction, several participants spoke of the importance of providing options for students who are not academically inclined, and some expressed appreciation of the MEQ's efforts in promoting vocational education. Some felt there is a contradiction between the new curriculum and the need to teach toward MEQ exams. And a few pointed out that once the reform is introduced in secondary schools, CEGEPs will also have to take measures to encourage student success.

Homework

The participants were asked to complete two assignments in preparation for the next training session, which will take place on March 12-13. First, they are to select a subject-specific or, if they feel comfortable, a cross-curricular competency and bring at least two work samples from each of three students demonstrating progress in the development of the competency. The second assignment involves choosing an object or a book—a work of fiction or poetry, a comic book, a nonfiction book—that is culturally rich and bringing it to the session. The focus in those two days will be on the development of competencies within a specific cycle.

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***Schoolscapes, The Newsletter* is published by the preschool, elementary and secondary education sector**
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ISSN 1492-3556
13-0000-14